

14867

K Academicus.

THE
PRINCIPLES and PRACTICES¹²
OF THE
METHODISTS
CONSIDERED,
IN SOME
LETTERS
TO
The LEADERS of that SECT.

The first addressed to the
Reverend Mr. Bennet E.

WHEREIN
Are some REMARKS on his TWO LETTERS to a Clergy-
man in Nottinghamshire, lately published.

He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the
just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord.
Prov. xvii. 15.

The SECOND EDITION, Corrected.

L O N D O N :

Printed for W. BRISTOW, next the Great Toy-Shop,
in St. Paul's Church-Yard.

M DCC LXI.

[Price 1s.]

ADVERTISEMENT.

—The LETTERS herein referred to
were published under the Title of,
“ A Fragment of the True Re-
ligion, being the Substance of two
Letters from a Methodist Preacher
in Cambridgeshire, to a Clergy-
man in Nottinghamshire.” —

Printed for J. WILLIAMS, under St. Dun-
stan's Church, in Fleet-street. Price 6d.



REV^d. SIR,

 Letter of yours accidentally fell in my way not long ago. It was put into my hands by one of my friends in the country, and as it is written on a very important and interesting subject, I could not help running it over with some eagerness. It gives an account of various matters relating to yourself, your opinions, and conduct; particularly some extraordinary light you have lately been favoured with, and the steps you have taken in consequence of that information; it contains some little anecdotes of *your manner of life from your youth up*, relates the precise time and circumstances of your wonderful conversion, sets forth the mistakes in your religious belief, which a wrong education had led you into, the ill effect of those mistakes upon your own ministry, and the ill effect they cannot but have on that of your unconverted brethren; it proceeds to lay open the principles of your new faith, its perfect agreement with scripture and the doctrines of the church, which most of your grace-
B less

less fraternity have deserted ; the amazing success of your late ministrations ; your entire confidence that your eyes are now opened, and your devout joy for that happy event ; the great pleasure you receive from your daily endeavours to lead others, and the unspeakable satisfaction you should have in leading the friend to whom you write, *to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.*

This epistle was sent, I have heard, by a trusty hand, and unsealed ; that some of the faithful probably might have the benefit of perusing it in its passage. It is said to have been circulated with much industry, as a masterpiece of its kind ; but I know not that this was done with your privity or permission. However, as it was professedly intended to carry on the good work of conversion, and boasts of proselytes from all quarters, both of clergy and laity, who are daily crowding to your standard : as it treats of matters which every well-meaning christian ought to be truly informed in, especially at a time when a set of new reformers are so ready with their advice, and so fluent in their harangues to the people, I take the liberty of thus addressing myself to you on the subject of it*.

I mean

* This epistle, which I had preserved as an invaluable treasure in MS. and had made a few remarks upon at the request of some country friends, where it was much handed about,

I mean not by this, Sir, to challenge or decoy you into a paper-war, which has often furnished large materials for that other phenomenon you are pleased to divert yourself with, a paper-kite†: nor do I write it with much expectation of any effect it is likely to have upon you; for I would not enter on the hopeless task of questioning the reality of impressions which you say you feel, and of voices which you say you heard. I would only advise you on so trying an occasion, *excutere te atque explicare intelligentiam tuam*; I would only suggest the expediency of being upon your guard against seductions of every kind; that you be not practised upon by the artifices of others, or flattered by the delusions of your own imagination; that you be not led away, as many I am afraid are, by the vain presumption of extraordinary illuminations, and by that means contract one of the most dangerous and deceitful of all religious maladies, the tumor of spiritual pride.

I am willing to take this occasion of explaining my sentiments on that system of opinions and conduct, which you seem to have adopted, and which is held by your fellow-labourers in the same cause. Many I fear are imposed upon by the lofty preten-

about, is lately published; and on that account I write to you in this public manner.

† See Mr. B's 2d Letter, p. 24.

sions you make, and the confident airs you assume ; when these are plainly put on to amuse the vulgar, and those are a kind of half claims to something extraordinary, calculated to serve the same purpose ; which you care not willingly to quit, and dare not explicitly avow. Some of your arguments must appear to me, as they do to other common understandings, not very clear or conclusive, because the force of them chiefly depends on your own feelings, and is not founded on any methods of human reasoning, which are in use among us. The frequent application of scripture-passages to yourselves, whatever self-importance it may be owing to, or whatever admiration it may produce among your followers, is apprehended by many to border often a little too near on arrogance and presumption. Your interpretations of holy writ have oft something of a plausible appearance, when they have nothing of a just and real foundation ; seeming to agree with the literal sense of the words, when they plainly contradict the whole tenor of its meaning, and are utterly inconsistent with the intention and express terms of the christian covenant.

Several of those passages relate to the exercise of extraordinary powers, granted to some christians in the first ages of the church, and which were necessary then for its support or
pro-

propagation, but which were neither promised, nor seem necessary, nor appear to have been granted in following ages. Your charge on the clergy for deserting the doctrines to which they have solemnly assented, is aggravated not only beyond what candor and christian charity would permit, but beyond what truth and justice will warrant you to say; and if you knew so much of their opinions, as you pretend, you must be sensible what wrong is done to them by your representation. This disposition and these talents do not qualify you, in any eminent degree, to be safe and trusty guides through that narrow way, which few can find; but which you and your friends, it seems, are the only happy few, who have found, "the way of salvation."

I have fallen perhaps into these strange notions thro' the influence of prejudices, into which I may have been led by the early bias of an academic education. I was trained up, as you complain you were, to carry on my study of the Scriptures by the common methods of human assistance, and to pursue my search after religious knowledge by the glimmering and unsteady light which human science could give me. I am still in danger of adhering to these old prepossessions, 'till I have clear evidence that they are ill-grounded. I am loth utterly to abandon

don the guidance of my reason, fallible as it is, in enquiries which relate to my own happiness, until I can meet with some other direction on which I can more safely depend; until I am free from all danger of adopting in its room that which may prove the suggestions of conceit, or the illusions of fancy. As I am not so happy as to have experienced those secret communications, or felt that influx of extraordinary light which you and your friends have, I am not qualified to look down on the weakness of all literary institutions with that noble contempt with which you do.

How sadly, in the mean time, have we been misled by the ill judgment, whatever we may owe to the good intentions of those weak, but well-meaning men, our founders? who vainly thinking, as you it seems once did, that human learning was a necessary qualification for a divine, provided, at so much trouble and expence, such a vast apparatus for pursuits of that nature; who have led us thro' all the mazes of an intricate and tedious education, and reared these seats of learning for the advancement of religious knowledge, without *seeing that nothing keeps us so much from the truth, as the desire of human wisdom*; who have been so totally mistaken in their whole project of improving the means of piety and forward-
ing

ing us in the way of salvation, that they never were aware of what you *perceive so clearly, that it is as difficult for a wise or learned man to be saved, as it is for a rich man, or a nobleman**. Yet so humble-minded, I find, you are, that you condescend to keep up some connexion with these learned bodies, tho' you suffered such loss of time, and have been retarded so far by their means in your progress to true wisdom; tho' you discern the futility of all the instruction they can give, you are so good as to share still in the benefit of the small emoluments they can bestow.

But pray reflect a little, Sir, on the effect of those unwearied endeavours, which you and some other members of learned foundations, in our sister university, are pleased to exert, in order to depreciate the value, and decry the use of human learning! think what would be the consequence of your succeeding so far in your endeavours, as to alter the prevailing sentiments, and adjust the general opinion to your standard? Should those expensive endowments, which the mistaken zeal and piety of our forefathers made, continue to be misapplied to no useful purpose? And are not the governors of the nation, who watch over the public welfare, concerned to prevent such a misapplication? Why

* Mr. Berridge's Letter, p. 15.

should

should these bulky foundations be longer supported, if they occasion only a needless waste of time and money? If the scriptures may as well be understood and interpreted in a cobbler's stall, as in the round-about way of collegiate instruction? If the doctrines of religion may be as well, or as you seem to hold, better explained and illustrated from a taylor's bulk, than from a professor's chair!

You indeed, as is plain from your declarations and practice, have wholly free'd yourself from the slavery of those early opinions, by which you were misled: you formerly apprehended, while your judgment was under the influence of old prejudices, that "*no one ought to preach, unless they had taken a degree;*" nay, so strongly did these prejudices operate, that "*you thought it high presumption in any to preach, unless they had taken orders:*" but these were notions fit only for the nonage of your unregenerate state; you harbour no such antiquated opinions now; when "*God opened your eyes,*" as with great confidence you affirm he did, *about half a year ago, he shewed and taught you other things.* In consequence of which divine instruction, you now hold, that every one "*is qualified to preach the gospel, who has the gift of utterance**; you have taken your serving-man accordingly, I hear, to be a fellow-labourer

* Letter, p. 16.

with

with you in the ministry, and Caleb is employed in the same important commission of preaching the gospel "with the journeymen of Nazareth †."

Here I must confess, how sensible I am of the difficulty of entering into any debate with you, or such as have the same kind of pretensions with yours; for by what standard are we to try the reality of your claims, or the propriety of your conduct? If we are for bringing the matter to the bar of reason, you demur to her jurisdiction. If the

† An appellation which the Moravians frequently give to Christ's Apostles.

Caleb is one of the ignorant and illiterate assistants employed by Mr. B. in the office of preaching: He succeeded one Clarke, who was hired to be his servant, but happening to differ from his master in his notion of irreverible and unconditional decrees, he had the hardiness to propagate that doctrine. By this means he drew away many of the common people, and justly incurred his master's displeasure; who unable to convince him of his mistake, discharged him from his service. This Clarke has a father, who is a gifted person, and preaches with great power in the inland parts of the kingdom, and it was by this trusty hand, that the letter, the weighty subject of our present consideration, was sent unsealed into Nottinghamshire. Clarke had not been long with his master, before he conceived himself, and expressed to his country-friends, great hopes of his speedy conversion. I know not that he was any way concerned in the manœuvre, by which it was brought about; but a writer on this subject intimates, that impositions of this sort have not been uncommon. "Have you never heard (says he) of stories that have passed concerning some poor deluded people, who have fancied themselves inspired? How others have imposed on their weakness, by cunningly contriving, that some voice or call might reach their ears, which was nothing but some body unseen," &c. Bayly's Essay on inspiration, p. 30.

C

maxims

maxims of human prudence, the decisions of public wisdom, or the preservation of good order be pleaded, these lesser considerations are soon over-ruled by the necessity " of obeying God, rather than man." If the authority of scripture be appealed to, scripture is not to be understood by the use of our natural faculties, nor is to be judged of by the same rules which help to direct our judgment of other writings; its meaning, your brethren tell us, is only to be apprehended by some extraordinary act of spiritual illumination. If the certainty of these secret communications be called in question, it is to doubt the testimony of your senses, and the evidence of what you have heard or felt. To what common measure of truth then can what we say be referred, while you claim to act and to understand by something like, for you do not expressly vouch it to be, a divine direction, and I can only pretend to think and to speak " after the manner of men."

However, to proceed in this matter as well as its very nice and peculiar nature will admit, let us look at your own account of that call, which first drew you out as an adventurer in the fields; which released you from the danger you and your flock had been in, and disengaged you from the long and perilous adhesion to that rock, " on which you tell us, *you had been splitting for near thirty years.*" Your first secret misgivings, it seems, that

that you were not right yourself, happened about Christmas 1757; after you had served a curacy for six years, without bringing one soul to Christ, and preached as unsuccessfully for two years more at the parish of Everton: these misgivings growing stronger, and at last painful, you fell into great doubts, cried earnestly to the Lord, and after ten days crying, heard the following words, which were darted into your mind with wonderful power, and seemed indeed like a voice from heaven, "cease from thy own works*."

Whether you meant to found on this wonderful incident any pretensions to an extraordinary mission, I cannot pretend to say, as you have not been so explicit as to declare. But by observing more caution and reserve on this subject, than most of your fraternity have done, you will not be so open indeed, as some have been, to the charge of presumption, but then you will not be thought to march forth with all that fullness of authority, with which others of your brethren have been invested. However, the scales fell immediately from your eyes, and by a sudden influx of divine light, conveyed in this extraordinary way to your understanding, as every reader I think will apprehend the relation, you clearly saw the above mentioned rock, were convinced of the dangerous mistake yourself had been in, and were

* Letter, p. 3.

enabled to make those wonderful discoveries to others, which we shall see in the sequel.

I am not now disposed to call in question the credibility or certainty of this divine communication, which I know is held by some to be the most certain and undubitable of all our knowledge; I must only beg leave to observe, that whatever assurance of its original it might produce in you, it cannot reasonably be supposed to produce the same degree of assurance in me, unless it be made appear to me by some farther evidence, that it really came from the father of light and the source of knowledge; who doubtless can, and has on some occasions been pleased so infuse the clearest manifestations of his will, and to impress the mind with the most unquestionable conviction, that they were sent by him: but this is not his usual and ordinary method of proceeding with his creatures.

The whole doctrine of heavenly voices and visions, of secret impressions and illuminations, as laid down by our modern reformers, has this natural and obvious exception in its way, that it is not agreeable to the other part of God's providential administration, nor suitable to the nature of a moral being, placed in a state of trial and probation. We are not sensible that God does, nor has he told us that he will, usually manifest himself by any extraordinary acts of his power, or display of his presence; he
leaves

leaves us to discern him in the order of his works, and the regular government of his providence. He has given us his written word, as the standing rule of our religious conduct; in interpreting and applying this rule we must make use of our understanding, cultivated in the best manner we are able, and furnished with all the helps we can procure. What assistance from his good spirit he is pleased to give us for apprehending this rule, or living suitably to it, will doubtless be given in such a way, as is consistent with our liberty and the free exercise of our own faculties.

My idea of gospel-faith, as the result of fair and impartial enquiry, or the test of an ingenuous and unprejudiced mind; as having * a blessing annexed to it, on account of some rectitude of temper, or goodness of character, which it is supposed to imply; as founded on sufficient evidence, but requiring candor and industry to examine and acknowledge that evidence, I can by no means reconcile with those accounts of faith, which make it a sudden and momentary act, effected in an instantaneous, and operating in an irresistible manner†. Where conviction is attained by secret and sensible impressions, without any proper exertion of our

* John xx. 29.

† See Mr. Whitefield's and Mr. Wesley's Journals, *passim*.

own faculties ; and where the co-operation of the will seems to be as little concerned, as any efforts or assistance of the understanding.

I would also remind you, that all the famous religionists and devotees of every persuasion, with almost every author of a new sect among the Romanists, have put in their respective claims to these extraordinary informations, and pretended to act under a divine direction. The founder of every society in that communion, every male and female saint in their calendar, had these wonderful calls and commissions for what they taught or appointed, and yet I trust you will not think yourself obliged to believe the truth of their doctrines, or the utility of their appointments. The whole succession of Hæresiarchs from Montanus down to the German Count, have made the same confident pretensions. You will say nothing, I suppose, in defence of the old sensualist, nor much I believe for the modern refiner in sensuality ; whose hymns exhibit as good a specimen of pure devotion, as his sermons do of practical divinity. I could produce a great list of these holy pretenders, all or any of whose claims to illumination you would be loth to admit ; and tho' we may think better of your honesty and understanding, than of the others, yet you will not wonder

wonder at our hesitating a little to admit your account of this event without some farther evidence or explication of it's meaning; as it does not appear that any part of the written law of Christ was to be explained to private persons, as the old law was delivered to the Jewish people, *by a voice from Heaven.*

This kind of evidence may be, and has been made use of by some who meant to attack christianity, as well as by others, who have undertaken to support it. Lord Herbert, a sensible and serious writer, is generally understood to have carried on an indirect attempt against revelation in his tract *de veritate*, and to have aimed by some parts of his reasoning to undermine the foundation on which it stands. He is said to have offered an earnest prayer to Heaven, that some sign might be sent to satisfy his doubts, whether he should publish or suppress this book. Such a sign he believed was sent, and it satisfied him. “ A loud, “ yet gentle voice, as he relates it, came “ forth from the heavens (for it was like “ nothing on earth) which did so cheer and “ comfort me, that I took my petition as “ granted.—This, how strange soever, adds “ he, it may seem, I protest before the eternal God is true, neither am I any way superstitiously deceived therein.” Now what are

are we to think of such a marvellous relation, given by so respectable a person, and accompanied with such marks of sincerity? Are we any ways directed to apply to heaven for extraordinary direction in such a case, or encouraged to expect such an instance of its visible interposition, if we should apply? Can it be supposed, that the ruler of the universe would thus give his testimony in favour of a work, calculated to destroy that religion, which he had introduced and established by so many incontestible proofs? or must we imagine, that this learned man, satisfied with the impartiality of his own researches, thought he had discovered some important truths, but yet doubted about the expediency of publishing them: and in this state of mind interpreted a natural incident, as a divine direction to do, what he was disposed to do himself*?

Most of the leaders, with whom you now concur in promoting the cause of methodism, set out with the same confident assurance of a divine commission, or speak of their designation to this employment in such language, as the generality of their readers will apprehend to convey that meaning. They were favoured with calls and directions from heaven on almost every occasion, even such slight and trivial ones, as

*See Leland's View, &c. Lett. 2. p. 22, 23, &c. Edit. 1757.

would

would not justify, according to the common rules of judging, so extraordinary an interposition. Whatever business they are engaged in, though sometimes of no mighty importance, whatever errand they go about, though often not of the greatest significance, it is still *the Lord's doing*. Whether they are at home or abroad, in good or evil plight; whether it rains or clears up, whether they escape a shower or are wetted by it, it is all owing to some divine direction, and made to answer some great purpose. Every thing about them, the tempers of men, the weather, the seasons, wonderfully favour and co-operate with their particular designs, as every one, who shall think it worth his while, may see in the authentic relations of these celebrated Journalists.

But Mr. Whitefield himself, it seems, had early trials and buffetings by bad spirits, as well as kind assistances and infusions from good ones. Some little incidents of his youth, which a stander-by might be apt to impute to obstinacy of temper or slowness of understanding, are only to be accounted for upon this supposition. His incapacity to write, and his unwillingness to attend the outward means of improvement, were owing to the delusions of this malignant being. Thus he relates the matter. "*The devil sadly imposed upon me in the matter of my college-*
D *exercises.*

exercises. I had no power to compose or write a word ; had a violent inward cbeck not to go down into the hall ; the next week he served me so again ; my Tutor, as well he might, took me to be really mad."*

Many of your brethren it must be owned, from long practice in these matters, have attained to wonderful skill in discovering the artifices and detecting the disguises of these malicious beings. They have found them out in many a subtle and wily stratagem, where persons of less experience would have been deceived. It is therefore very surprizing to me, that they did not better understand the devises of Satan, than to listen to his suggestions about publishing what they wrote : that when they had seen him assume such a variety of shapes, they should not discern him lurking under the appearance, and seducing them to this sad instance of indiscretion in the questionable shape of a printer's boy. By this unwary step they have done incredible mischief to your cause ; as the

* Mr. W. found means to comfort himself under this inability to write by a lucky expedient, viz. the application of a prophetic description to himself ; when unable to compose any thing, (says he) I found a quotation out of Ezekiel, "*Young Prophet, thou shalt be dumb, but when I speak unto thee, then shalt thou speak ;*" which made me quite easy. 1st Dealing, p. 67.

Though the Lord has a thousand times over told me, (says Mr. Seward) that he loved me with an everlasting love ; yet Satan had the impudence to tell me,—that I was like Judas, and would betray Christ. Journ.

mysteries

mysteries of methodism are laid open to unhallowed eyes ; as not only those pretensions, which could not fail to have raised admiration, when couched under dubious expressions and thrown out in extemporary effusions to the people, are now subject to be scrutinized by sceptical men ; but their mistakes, conceits and inadvertencies, their foibles and failings, stand now recorded in lasting characters, cruelly exposed to the laughter of the incredulous, and the scoff of the prophane.

Some of them however, particularly Mr. Whitefield, have frankly acknowledged both errors in opinion, and mistakes in conduct. He has been willing to revoke some hasty censures, and to own that *wild fire had been mixed with the holy fire of zeal* ; he has recalled some presumptuous claims, such as his having assumed *too apostolical a stile*, preferred *inward impressions to the written word*, and spoken too much *by his own spirit, when he thought he had been speaking by the Spirit of God*. He now doubts about the certainty of those infusions which he felt so clearly, and the reality of those gifts which he valued so highly *. This ingenuous confession may in some measure atone for his former presump-

* See Mr. Whitefield's Letter written on board the brig Betsy, and inserted in the 2d part of " The Enthusiasm of " Methodists and Papists compared." p. 23.

tion, and as it contains a renunciation of his most important pretensions, ought to have some effect in opening the eyes of his followers. I would recommend it to your cool and serious consideration.

You, Sir, are also a man ; a great one indeed, but fallible ; subject to like passions, and liable to the same infirmities with others. You presume on your having been so highly favoured as to have had a mistake, you had long been under, rectified by an extraordinary revelation, *by a voice or what seemed like a voice from heaven* ; a great distinction, but not experienced by common christians, nor promised under the gospel-covenant ; a means of conviction, not suitable to the ordinary course of God's dispensations, and therefore not to be believed by yourself without the fullest assurance, nor to be credited by others without the clearest evidence. You apprehend much danger to our spiritual condition from self-righteousness, do you think none is to be apprehended from self-importance ? This appears to me as dangerous and deceitful a disorder, as any of those, by which the mind of man can be affected ; this is apt to swell men with presumption, to raise in them lofty thoughts of their own significancy, and inspire them with strange conceits of being the peculiar favourites of heaven ; this may deceive well-disposed persons, it has deceived

ceived, as we have seen, the *very elect*, who mistook, by their own confession, the suggestions of vanity for the infusions of grace, and the fumes of an over-heated fancy for directions from the Spirit of God.

But you lay great stress on the success of your present labours, as if God hereby gave a publick attestation, "*that he blessed and owned your ministry. As soon as ever I preached Jesus Christ, and faith in his blood, believers were then added to the church continually* *:" for as you seem to assert, though you do not chuse to do it in exprefs terms, something like an apostolick mission, you and the rest of your fraternity generally assume a stile, suitable to the dignity of your character and the importance of your errand. But as *people, you say, flock from all parts to hear*, delivered now from your mouth in its native purity, *the glorious sound of the gospel*, did no reflection ever occur to your mind on this Occasion, did no other reason of this concourse offer itself, but one so favourable to your cause, I had almost said so flattering to your vanity; but vanity sure under your present spiritual attainments must have been laid aside, as well as all the other *graceless furniture of the old man* †? Did you never once think, that the power of novelty was a cir-

* 1st Letter, p. 13.

† Dr. Warburton's sermon on Edification, &c.

cumstance,

cumstance, which might co-operate a little with your own endeavours, and have its share in drawing this numerous crowd after you? One who has duely attended to the common course of events, must have observed, in a variety of instances, the wonderful force of this passion for what appears new; and will see abundant reason to conclude, that elocution from a stool, or vociferation from a hillock, whatever sort of religious information may be delivered from thence, will act with much more effect upon the multitude, than any kind of sober instruction, given in a plain way, and from that old-fashioned eminence, the pulpit.

If to this newness in the manner, you add a little of the marvellous in the matter, its power of affecting will be increased, and it will be received with more avidity of attention, proportionably to the quantity of the wonderful it contains. When you harangue the swains at Everton, you are by your own account well attended; but St. Francis, I doubt not, when he preached to the swallows, was attended much better; a methodist, when he preaches up salvation by *faith alone*, will draw numbers about him; if he does it in the utmost latitude of the Antinomian principle, and to the absolute exclusion of all works, he may be expected to draw much greater; but should any one undertake

dertake to bring all the sheep and asses in the fields to hear him, as the above mentioned saint is said to have done *, I would lay money on his side, that he outdoes them both.

Some oblique strokes of satire on the indolence, self-interest and corruption of modern preachers, will likewise take mightily with the populace, and never fail to raise you in their esteem. No diversion tickles the fancy of the mob so much, (a circumstance, which you doubtless have found out) as when one of their betters is brought in to be baited. If it be one of the worldly-minded clergy, who minds the fleece more than the flock, the pleasure is much improved, and the triumph is considerably heightened. A Jew or a relapse will pretty well satisfy the appetite of some Popish countries, but you cannot give the rabble here a higher treat, than by serving up one of your own order for their entertainment.

The doctrines of Free Grace, Election and Reprobation, will also be wonderfully and always pleasing to a popular audience. The gracious distribution of spiritual gifts without any regard to the merit or qualifications of those to whom they are given: the rank to which the *man of low degree on earth* is to be advanced as one of the Elect, or favourites of

* Book of Conformities, fol. 280, 281.

heaven ;

heaven ; the general and indiscriminating denunciation of woe against those, who *in their life-time have received their good things* ; these topicks never fail to engage the attention, and gain applause from those of the lower class : and they will please more in the hands, and under the skilful direction of a master, who can illustrate them in that familiar way which is so level to the capacity of all his hearers ; who has the happy talent of adorning them with that species of oratory, the *humile & demissum dicendi genus*, in which your brotherhood is allowed so much to excel.

As it may be difficult to abstract low and groveling minds from the grossness of material things, it may be, and has often been dangerous to the publick peace, to raise in the vulgar too high notions of their favour and interest in heaven ; for whatever description of spiritual rewards or images of celestial happiness you may set before them, I much doubt whether they will not direct their thoughts to meer objects of sense, will not swell with the expectation of earthly blessings, and plume themselves on the value of those reversionary possessions, which will fall to their share, *when the saints come to inherit the earth* *.

Nor

* The history of Enthusiasm abounds with instances of this kind ; a very remarkable one is said to have happened lately
in

Nor is it a small recommendation of these doctrines to the common people, that as every thing is represented to be done for them by the all-sufficient merits of a Saviour, little or nothing is understood to remain that can be properly done by themselves. Obligations of duty are in a great measure superseded, attention to behave properly under all the various relations of life is held by many to be unnecessary, any attempts to improve in virtuous living may be deemed presumptuous by some, and acts of an arrogant self-righteousness; or probably the dangerous artifices of Satan to seduce them from the right way of salvation †. It is thus much

in the neighbourhood of Nottingham. The Elect were taught to expect some extraordinary acknowledgment of their cause, and visible interposition in their favour. Swords were to come from heaven, with which, like Joshua, they should conquer the devoted people, and divide their land. By some management a day was inadvertently fixed upon for the accomplishment of these great things. The day came, but no heavenly weapons were sent, no supernatural appearances seemed to favour the attempt. It past, and nothing was done. By-standers began to laugh, the doubtful and wavering revolted, the faithful themselves were many of them disconcerted, and *went away sorrowful*, for though they had not, they expected *to have had, great possessions*.

† Mr. Wesley complains, that multitudes cease from all means of grace;—make a jest of going to church, &c.—and are tempted to leave off good works, in order to increase their faith.—He cites a Moravian expounder, as affirming openly, that “As many go to hell by praying, as by thieving.”—Jour. 4.

The legendary writers go farther, and tell us, that the devil, to carry on some purposes of his own, has been found out at *mas*s and confession, disguised in the habit of a monk.—

E

easier

easier to take hold of eternal life by a confident persuasion, that they are the elect and the accepted, and to be warmed into holy raptures by the contemplation of this glorious prospect, than to seek it in the beaten track of gospel-obedience, by treading the dead flat of duty, and dragging on in the insipid sameness of a sober and religious life.

One might however naturally expect from one commissioned in so extraordinary a manner, and the discharge of whose commission was attended with such wonderful success, that all his proceedings should breathe forth the genuine spirit of the gospel, that whatever he said or did should exhibit the fairest marks and characters of an ambassador from Christ. It is with concern I am forced to acknowledge, that there does not appear to me in your writings or practice that humility of mind, that candour of judgment, that good-will towards your brethren, which I should look upon as the most certain tokens of a person truly regenerated, and the clearest characteristics of one so highly favoured of God. What you sometimes say is so contrary to the best notions I have been able to form of a truly christian and charitable temper, that I cannot read the following sentence without being chilled with horror at the grave and deliberate cruelty with which
it

it is uttered. “*Have you constantly preached this doctrine,*” (*viz.* that men must be saved partly by faith and partly by works?) “*then you may be certainly assured of these two things.* 1st, *That you have never yet brought one soul to Christ by your ministry; and, 2dly, that you are not yet in the way of salvation yourself*.*”

Could any one, who has not been lifted up to the highest pitch of fanatical assurance by voices and impressions and experiences, thus rashly dare to determine a point, which lies beyond the reach of human knowledge? or pronounce thus presumptuously in a matter, wherein the Scriptures have made no express declaration?—but what preposterous conduct is it in you, who, while you charge the clergy with advancing to Rome, and preaching papistical doctrines, are practising, as if you were already arrived there, the worst of papistical tricks, in excluding from salvation all those who happen to differ from you in opinion. This rigour of judgment is still more to be wondered at, as contrary to those qualified sentiments, and inconsistent with that great moderation of temper, which some of your leaders have openly professed on this subject. *’Tis a point we chiefly insist upon,* says Mr. Wesley †, *that er-*

* 1st Lett. p. 13.

† Plain Account, p. 4.

thodoxy, or right opinions, is at best but a very slender part of religion, if any part of it at all.

I am disposed to think well of your good meaning, yet there are many appearances in your conduct, if credit may be given to some of your hearers, which look a little untoward, and are difficult to be accounted for : you are attended it seems in those frequent harangues, with which you have for some time amused the peasantry of this neighbourhood, with a constant number of groaners, sighers, tumblers, and convulsionists. These occasionally break out into such a dreadful concert of screams, howlings and lamentations, as surprizes and shocks the sober part of your audience, who are in doubt whether to ascribe those sudden explosions to the catching nature of enthusiasm, or the unusual power of methodistical oratory. You are reported to use on these occasions some strange expressions *, which, accompanied with a loud tone of voice, vehement gesture, wild looks, and that terrible relieve which is sometimes given to the cheeks and eyes of a field-preacher, must strongly operate on weak minds, and strike

* Among other strange and suspicious ones, the following have been related to me by one of your hearers. " Fall !
" won't you fall ! why don't you fall ! better fall here, than
" fall into hell !"

terror

terror into an ignorant and unexperienced multitude.

We know not enough perhaps of our own frame, or the secret operations of nature, to judge with certainty about some unusual appearances, or to pronounce whether they are the effects of enthusiasm and a disordered constitution, or the artifices of imposture, or the workings of some invisible power. You, I find, express yourself in such a manner on these occasions, as if you believed, or would have others believe, that they were not natural disorders, but owing to the agency of some invisible being, though you speak in doubtful terms as to the nature and quality of that being: you sometimes suggest, that they are the violent assaults of Satan struggling with his prey; sometimes, that they are the extraordinary operations of God's Spirit, exerting itself in fits of conversion. I desire to know, Sir, what authority you have for suggestions of this kind? for if you have not good authority, you will, I am afraid, lie under some suspicion of practising upon the weakness and credulity of the people.

I have not heard, that you have distinguished yourself by any of those feats, about which many of your brethren have so much boasted, in dispossessing these wicked beings from that dominion they had usurped over the bodies of men. However, as you have

have often intimated to your audience, that those strange contortions are owing to the power of these beings, I should be glad to know whether you have any certain rules, as the Romish exorcists are said to have, by which you can distinguish these common disorders from dæmoniacal possessions; or any clear marks to direct you in judging between the assaults of a bad, and the agitations of a good spirit; I should be pleased with any information in this difficult point, to secure myself and others, as far as I can, from the danger of delusion. But if you have no better helps to judge of this matter, than common christians have, how can you presume to suggest, that these bitter cries are extorted from your followers; these wreathings and distortions of the body are occasioned by the unwilling departure of those invisible beings; or that they are outward signs, which attest the inward work of God; the throes of regeneration, and the pangs of the new-birth*.

Other instances of your conduct in this new ministry are mentioned, which though

* Your brethren indeed agree with you in this notion. "It is in the spiritual as in the natural life, says one; some feel more, some less; but all experience pangs and travels, e'er Christ is formed in them.—As my mother bore me with great pain, (says another, 3d Journ.) so did I feel great pain in my soul, and I was in this violent agony for about four hours, then began to feel I was born again."

no way blameable in themselves, carry with them the appearance of more art and management, than is agreeable to that character of gospel-simplicity, which you are so fond of affecting. As you have approached nearer to the seat of learning, and been sometimes attended by persons of somewhat a more improved understanding, than the generality of your hearers, you have been observed to lower that extravagant and enthusiastic rant you were used to practice, to soften that dreadful and reprobating language with which you were wont to terrify the vulgar, and to correct, in many respects, that foolishness of preaching, in which at other times you were so apt to indulge.

Some of your female followers, who in hearing you have been frequently seized with convulsive motions, and been remarkable for screaming, groaning and dropping to the ground, yet seem not, as far as people can judge from outward demeanour, to be reclaimed from habits of vice by these seemingly horrible and repeated sufferings. Tho' they have experienced such agonies of mind and body, have, in the language of your sect, *suffered the wrath of God, felt the two-edged sword, and had their hearts gnawed by the dogs of hell**, yet several of them still continue to give offence to serious persons, by a loose and

* Wesley's 3d Journ. 79, 93, &c.

disorderly

disorderly behaviour; which I do not mention as a matter that ought to throw the least reflection upon you, but which must occasion some surprize or speculation among others.

They resorted to your preaching in the manner you seem to require, *as sinners heavy laden*; for some of them bore about them the indisputable marks, and carried the visible burthen of their sin. But from many outward signs, which fell under your notice since that time, you might judge more favourably of the inward condition of their minds, than I am afraid they deserve. You might apprehend from the frequent fits of conversion into which they fell, that they were really converted to a sober life and conversation; but the case, if I am rightly informed, is otherwise, and they are as liable to be seduced as ever, *by the wiles of the enemy*.

However, it must be very comfortable to one of these frail sisters, and doubtless a good reason for her attending on such outward means and opportunities of comfort, if she should be addressed by you in the consolatory manner, lately used by one of your fraternity; *Art thou a sinner? Mighty well!—Art thou a vile and reprobate sinner? Better still!—Art thou a lost and undone sinner? Best of all! it was for such as thee, that Christ died.*

We

We come at length to the substance of that important message, which was conveyed to you in the wonderful manner you relate, and *seemed indeed* (for nothing is of more use than a prudent reserve on these nice occasions) *like a voice from heaven*. It was neither more nor less, it seems, than this sentence, "*Cease from thy own works.*" Yet this is, if I mistake not, a leading and favourite tenet of that sect, whose *principles you disown*, against whom you have *borne a preaching testimony*, and who in return *revile and detest you*. By the best light and information I have been able to procure about the opinions or practices of the Moravians, from others as well as from yourself, I should not have imagined so near an affinity or intercourse to have been established between heaven and them, that their strange principles or language should have had the sanction and authority of a voice from thence.

What the works were, from which you were required by this authoritative message to cease, you must best know. Against all bad ones, and even the appearance of them, as far as we can guard against it, we have the express and authentic commands of holy writ to warn us; to good works of every kind we are excited by its precepts, encouraged by its promises, animated by its examples. To promote indeed the sincere and uniform

F

practice

practice of these Christ came from heaven ; and I can't easily bring myself to think, that a voice should be sent from thence to frustrate any part of his commission, much less to counteract the chief design and end of his coming.

But we are not to adhere too closely to the letter, we must use some latitude to find out the proper meaning and interpretation of this message : it was meant to correct a wrong and dangerous notion you had all along entertained ; *you had hoped to be saved partly in your own name, and partly in Christ's name* ; this dependence, Sir, on the virtue and efficacy of names will ever be a fallacious ground of hope in religion, as too great a reliance on their authority has proved a fruitful source of errors in science. Mistakes of this sort sprung up early in the christian church ; much was expected by some from the credit and merits of their respective leaders, while one was of Paul, another of Apollos, and another of Cephas ; the same kind of expectations may probably have been raised in their followers from the high character of some apostolical men among ourselves ; while we plain christians believe, as we have been taught, that salvation is to be had by no other name under heaven but his, who has published to all men the new covenant of grace, and made faith and good works

works the appointed means of securing to themselves the benefits of this covenant.

Here it will be proper to enter on a more particular and exact consideration, what are the terms of our acceptance with God ; what are the ordinary conditions of salvation, as laid before us in the gospel, the gracious charter of our christian privileges ; or as occasionally explained in any of those writings, which we believe to be of divine original, and which may be useful for our farther instruction in righteousness.

Could this matter be debated on those common principles, with which we are acquainted ; by the known rules of reasoning and interpreting all other writings, we might come to some probable decision, and leave the merits of the cause, when we had stated it as clearly, and supported it as strongly as we could, to the understanding of the reader ; but if you pretend to extraordinary communications, with which we are unacquainted ; if you have recourse to particular impressions, experiences, and influxes of light, by which you are enabled clearly to see all divine truths, and sensibly to feel conviction ; though we must not deny the clearness or certainty of what you see or feel, yet your seeing or feeling cannot reasonably be supposed to have the effect of satisfying

tifying us, who have not been favoured with the same means of conviction *.

The great Father of lights, who perfectly knows all the various inlets of knowledge, and to whose view every avenue to the human mind is open, can doubtless impress upon it any communications he may be pleased to make, with a fullness of evidence that is unquestionable, and a degree of force that is irresistible. He can do this on any occasion, and we know he has done it on some extraordinary ones. But we know also, that this has not been his usual way of dealing with rational, free, and accountable creatures; whose understanding and will he in many respects graciously may assist, but has seldom thought proper entirely to over-rule. As to any mode of information, which may have been vouchsafed to particular men for their own private use, I have nothing to say; but if on calls or voices from heaven, any kind of mission is

* This point is fully allowed, as it is happily illustrated by Mr. Wesley, whose authority will give weight to what I say on this subject. "Suppose God were now to speak to any soul,—he must be willing that soul should know his will; otherwise he would speak in vain; and he is able to effect this, for whenever he wills, to do is present with him, and he does effect it: that soul is absolutely assured, this voice is the voice of God. But yet he who hath that witness in himself, cannot explain it to one who hath not: nor indeed is it to be expected that he should." See his Sermon on the witness of the Spirit, in Vol. I. p. 202, 203.

assumed to instruct others in matters of religious opinion or practice, then it becomes us to enquire whether our instructors can produce any sufficient evidence of that supernatural light by which they claim to be assisted, or proper credentials of that authority, under which they pretend to act.

But without putting in any claim of this kind for myself, or entering into any farther dispute about the claims of others, I proceed to give my judgment of the important point before us, drawn as little as possible from the impure source of human learning, not borrowed from the skill of critics or the aid of commentators, but supported, as I conceive, by the whole scope and tenor of scripture-language, and agreeable, as I apprehend, to the true genius and main intention of christianity.

All the sober part of protestants, I think, are agreed, that the will of God, as far as it relates to what we are to believe or do, is revealed in the Scriptures; that these contain all the truths or general precepts, which are necessary for the right government or direction of our lives, and must doubtless be supposed to be consistent with themselves; that it should seem the best and safest rule of interpreting them, by which this consistency shall most clearly appear, and that agreement, which they undoubtedly have, shall be

be best preserved ; that if any passages are doubtful in their meaning, or any parts of them are wrought up to a more heightened and figurative stile than the rest ; the meaning of those darker passages will be best ascertained by comparing them with other parallel ones which are confessedly clear, that stile will be best understood by referring to similar places, written on the same subject, but in a plainer manner.

The gospel seems not intended to form a digest or regular system of laws, that may be applicable to all the various relations of life, public and private, in which men may be appointed to act. But then it fixes, what was before wanting, the true principle of all our religious obedience ; encourages it by a living example, and enforces it by the most powerful motives. It likewise lays before men some general rules of conduct, expressed in plain maxims, or drawn out into instructive parables, which may be proper to direct them in the more particular parts of their duty. It was therefore doubtless designed for the more immediate use and information of christians in all ages of the world.

The Apostolical Epistles, especially those of St. Paul, were many of them written with particular views, and directed to particular occasions ; to correct mistakes, obviate exceptions,

ceptions, or clear up difficulties, which had from time to time arisen among the followers of Christ. And though of equal authority with the other inspired writings, when we know the true sense of them, and understand the matters to which they relate; yet our ignorance of many circumstances, to which they often had a relation, that abrupt and digressive manner sometimes made use of, that raised and metaphorical language in which they are generally expressed, will usually make it a more difficult matter to come at their true sense and meaning.

Let us consider then in as dispassionate a manner, as we can, what the Scriptures, the sole rule of a protestant's faith, the true touchstone of all our religious opinions, say clearly of this matter; for surely they must say something clear about a matter so important and of such near concern to all men. And in this enquiry let us avoid, as much as possible, all expressions and terms of art, which controversy has been the occasion of introducing; and let us attend to things, to the principal end and intention of all the gracious dispensations, which God has been pleased to give. Though these have been in some degree adapted to the different conditions of men, and suited to the particular circumstances of those ages, in which they were granted, yet they plainly carry on one
great

great design, they all jointly conspire to promote our happiness, by improving our nature, and forming it to habits of goodness.

The necessity of a religious and virtuous life, called in some places repentance, in others obedience, according to the different circumstances, under which it is enjoined, is so essential a doctrine of the gospel, that there is hardly a page, which does not instruct us in it, or exhort us to it : which does not either encourage it by some example, or explain it by some figurative representation, or enforce it by some motive, or require it by some direct precept.

Great privileges were indeed proposed to men at its first publication, and still belong to all who are admitted into the new covenant : but then all are made accountable to God for the use they make of these privileges. They will not secure the end for which they were given, unless they are applied to their proper purpose of subduing our passions and regulating our conduct : they are so many helps and incitements to a good life ; but they must in reality produce it, before they can attain their full effect, and ensure our final salvation.

This you will perhaps say will be easily allowed ; if it is not, it may be as easily proved, or no one doctrine of the New
Testa-

Testament can be proved or established from thence. But the point is, what share good works have, or whether they have any share at all in our justification? which in many places is solely ascribed to the efficacy of faith, and said to be owing to the free grace and mercy of God.

The whole of this dispute rests, I apprehend, on the right interpretation of those passages in Scripture, which relate to this matter, and which, if the pertinent ones are considered only, would not be very numerous or difficult to be understood; and yet to what a massy and voluminous collection has this debate already swelled? what long and warm contention has it occasioned? and how much has the truth suffered by being thus entangled in the net of controversy, by being thus perplexed by sophistry, or subtilized by distinctions?

Let you and me then not look for it in any of those systematical productions, which are in part the inventions of men, but let us search for it in that book, which is undoubtedly the word of God; when we can go to the fountain-head of truth, to the original source of all our spiritual and religious knowledge, let us not content ourselves with satisfying our thirst at those formal and artificial canals which are drawn from it, and are said to be supplied by it.

G

I will

I will promise not to rest my faith on Bel-
larmine or Arminius, if you will engage in
return not to pay too implicit a submission
to Calvin.

If we make a rheam or two of waste-pa-
per on this subject, we shall add but little
to the immense stock that is already in hand.
For it is with great concern I must say,
and a sad topick of consolation it is to us
both, that however it has happened, whe-
ther through the defects and wrong ma-
nagement of the writers, or through the
laziness and ill judgment of the readers;
however important the subject may be in
itself, or how high soever it may stand in
our estimation, no one has sent larger sup-
plies to those sworn foes of all literature,
the *Tabernarii* or shop-keepers; who for
mean and mercantile ends are making such
continual depredations on the works of the
learned. However, to reduce the quantity,
as far as we can, let us not wrangle about
words or terms of art, but try how we can
agree in our notions of the thing.

The chief passages, which you produce
in support of your opinion, and on which
the merits of the cause are to rest, are taken
from St. Paul's epistles; they are well
enough known to all, tho' so differently
understood by different parties. I would
not now enter on a particular examination
of

of their meaning, but rather endeavour to settle some preliminary points, on which a just explication of them will much depend, and by which the harmony of the whole may be best established.

The Apostle was very conversant in the Jewish Scriptures, and much of his language alludes to usages which obtained under that dispensation. The imagery, which he chiefly makes use of in his epistle to the Romans, is plainly borrowed from the legal proceedings in one of their courts of justice. He represents all men, as summoned before God's judgment-seat, and being unable to produce any sufficient proofs of such an obedience as the law required, they are found guilty before him, and stand liable to the sentence of condemnation. Their acquittal from the guilt with which they were chargeable, and from the punishment to which they were obnoxious, is said to have been owing to no preceeding merit of their own, but to God's free mercy in not imputing their former sins to such as were admitted by faith into the covenant of his son. But to find the true meaning of many expressions, which are applied to the new law, we should know something of their usual acceptation under the old.

Justification appears to have various senses in the Old Testament, but the most common

one is a deliverance from any evil, temporal or spiritual. This notion of the word, that some are said to be justified, when they are only freed from some calamity, or rescued from some danger, may be supported I think by several passages out of the Scriptures *; accordingly that perfection of the Deity, which is usually translated *righteousness*, from whence our being justified or accounted righteous is plainly derived, often signifies any act of his favour, or effect of his gracious disposition towards us, which may relate to the safety of our persons or possessions, as well as to the salvation of our souls.

You may probably differ from me in the explication of one of the passages in the New Testament, to which I refer, and on which I partly found my opinion. Rahab the Harlot appears to me to have been justified, or rescued from that general destruc-

* See a catalogue of the various places in the Old and New Testament, where the word *δικαιοσύνη* has this meaning in that judicious and learned work, Taylor's Key to the Apostolick writings, prefixed to his paraphrase on the Romans. Agreeably to which, *δικαιῶσθαι* is to experience some instance of divine goodness in being delivered from evil. Is. xlv. 25. Ecclus. ix. 12, 23, 11. Rom. vi. 7. Jam. ii. 25. The same idea of mildness and compassion often belongs to *justus* & *justitia*, among the Latin writers. Vide Q. Curt. lib. 4. c. 11. Ter. Heauton. A. v. S. i. And. A. i. S. i. So it must be understood, Matt. i. 19. *Her husband (Joseph) being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example*; i. e. the clemency of his temper disposed him not to execute the rigour of the law.

tion in which the rest of her country perished, in consequence of her belief, that God by so many marks of his interposition in their favour had allotted the land of Canaan to the possession of the Israelites. Few monuments remain of her history or character, but as we may judge from the short sketch given of it, that she was a sinner, and perhaps an undone sinner, you may think that by this single act of faith she was received to mercy (for who will presume to set bounds to God's mercy!) and admitted to eternal life *.

I am no way positive as to the sense of this passage, though I judge the lower one, which confines it to temporal evil, more probable than the other; much less am I, Sir, for limiting the divine compassion, which is doubtless exercised in an infinity of ways, of which we have little or no conception. But yet I believe it is never exercised in a capricious manner, without any regard to the moral qualifications of the object, or some wise ends to which it may be subservient. It appears to me most likely to be dispensed in a manner, which may best support the just laws and preserve the righteous government of God; as these

* James ii. 25. compared with Heb. xi. 31. Joshua ii. 9. I know (says she) that the Lord hath given you this land.

ends most tend to promote his glory, and to advance the happiness of his creatures.

It is also to be observed that the whole nation of the Jews, on account of that peculiar relation they bore to God by virtue of the Mosaic covenant, obtained many high and distinguishing titles; they are called God's *elect*, his *sons*, his *flock*, his *heritage*; an *holy nation*, a *peculiar people*. But yet the individuals among them can hardly be supposed to share in the blessings which that covenant promised, unless they fulfilled the conditions which it required to be performed.

When some of the Gentiles became converts to the religion of Christ, by the pure mercy of God they obtained a gracious remission and forgiveness of their former sins; in consequence of which they are said to have been *redeemed*, *bought*, *called*, *justified*, *saved*; they are called *saints*, *elect*, *holy*, *beloved*, &c. by which I apprehend is to be understood, that they were brought into that state of salvation which the gospel published to all men, and admitted to the various privileges of the new covenant which it set forth; and this great blessing, this happy change of their situation, as being owing to no antecedent merit or righteousness of their own, is said to proceed, as indeed it could
only

only proceed, from the free grace and favour of God.

The whole body of christians in general, on account of the relation they bear to their head, have many appellations of regard and endearment bestowed upon them. They are stiled children and heirs of God; are said to be holy, saints, sanctified*; to be begotten again or regenerated to a lively hope. But though the christian church or society are all sharers in these signal privileges, yet it can hardly be thought, that they will all obtain the reward of eternal life. This advantageous condition, in which they are placed, must be duly improved, before it will produce its blessed effects; though *they are Christ's workmanship*, and altogether enabled by his gracious assistance to do what may be acceptable to God, yet when they have received that gracious assistance, *they are created in him to good works*; as they are properly qualified for, so they are indispensably obliged to the performance of them, as God *bath expressly ordained, that they should walk in them*; without acting suitably to his ordinance, they can hardly

* These and many more of these high titles, applied to christians in general, are to be met with in the apostolick writings, and need not be particularly referred to. This point, if any are disposed to doubt of it, is capable of being proved with abundant clearness and certainty.

be supposed to become proper objects of his favour and acceptance.

Many of the converted Jews still thought highly of the value and merit of legal righteousness; and some were for adding a compliance with the institutions of the law to the observance of the gospel. To correct these prevailing and dangerous mistakes, the apostle takes frequent occasion to beat down this groundless expectation; to shew both to the Jews and Gentiles, that such an obedience as they were able to pay to the precepts of the law, could not entitle them to God's acceptance, or give them a claim to the rewards of it; that a complete and undeviating observance was the hard condition it required; that it could admit of no relaxation in its terms, and had made no provision of pardon for such as violated them; that their admission into the gospel-covenant, and the new method of justification which it proposed, proceeded entirely from God's free mercy, and was owing to no desert or righteousness of their own; and therefore as it gave no claim to merit or reward, it gave no room for boasting; yet in the epistles, wherein this doctrine is so strongly expressed, nothing can be more clear and explicit, than the apostle's declarations about the necessity of a good and virtuous practice; that Christ is the
author

author of salvation *only to those who obey him*, and that the *fruit must be unto holiness, before the end can be everlasting life* *.

Several passages, applicable only to the admission of converts to the privileges of the gospel; by which they were *freely justified*, that is, acquitted from the guilt, and released from the punishment of their former sins, you and your brethren are wont to apply to that justification of christians, by which they are to obtain happiness in a future state of being. To the want of this proper distinction indeed is to be ascribed a good deal of that perplexity, in which this question has been lately involved. Many were received into this state of salvation by faith, and without any previous qualification of a holy life; but without improving under these means of grace, without making some proper attainments in holiness, *no man shall see God*; or be finally approved and accepted by him.

But where, you will probably say, is this distinction made, about two sorts of justification? and should not the Apostle have made it, if it be a just one, for fear of misleading his readers?—It is necessary now, Sir, to make his doctrine as clear as we can, and his meaning consistent; but many

* Heb. v. 9. ||. Rom. vi. 22. ||. 8, 13. ||. Gal. v. 16. with a variety of other places.

distinctions may be necessary now, which were not so when his epistles were written ; many helps to a true explication of his sense may seem now to be wanted, which yet have not been afforded us. How often does St. Paul in his epistles assume the person of another, and speak under a borrowed character, without signifying it to his reader ? what quick transitions does he make in his arguments, and how often argue only on the principles of his adversary, without any notice of his intention ? what long parentheses and breaks in his sense do we find, what sudden excursions from the subject he is upon, what perpetual references to legal usages and customs does he make, without specifying when he does so ? and what are we to infer from this ? that his writings, as I apprehend, are to be studied with care ; that the occasion and scope of his several epistles are to be attended to ; that the nature and intention of his arguments are to be duly considered, before we can come at his meaning, or make that meaning uniform. And this we must do by a diligent and vigorous exertion of those powers which God has given us ; we must apply for the ordinary assistances of his good spirit ; but we must not always depend on being favoured by an extraordinary direction.

If

If justification in this lower sense were promised to such, who in after ages should be converted from heathenism to christianity, yet it could hardly have place in a country, where we are educated and trained up in the principles of christianity. But many expressions, used by you and your soul-brethren, would almost make one think, that you were dispensing your instructions to a nation of Pagans. Lest future critics should be puzzled to explain this strange kind of phraseology, or to make out how it could happen in our age and country, that *forty clergymen*, ordained to preach the truths of the gospel, *should only be brought at Christmas last to the acknowledgment of the truth*; and how *three more*, authorized teachers of the christian faith, *should be only added to the faith within these six weeks*; it must be here observed once for all, that this language is used to favour the reception of some late pretensions; that this new dialect is assumed to support the credit, and to set forth the importance of a new mission.

If the great end of the gospel-dispensation, the salvation of our souls, be supposed by any to be attainable by faith, independent or exclusive of good works, how can this be reconciled with numberless passages in the sacred writings, which require doing as well as believing, and injoin obedience to

the precepts, as well as assent to the truths of the gospel? How can we make this notion any way consistent with St. James's doctrine, expressed, as far as I can see, in the fullest manner, and in the plainest language? But as this Apostle is understood by many to have written his epistle chiefly with a view of correcting some abuses in practice, which had arisen from a misconstruction of St. Paul's meaning; so some apostolical men among ourselves seem to have intended, by what they have advanced on the same subject, to rectify the mistakes of St. James.

If faith be an operative, or as some call it an energetic quality *, which comprehends an obedience to the commands of our master, as well as an acknowledgment of his mission; which ought to produce its genuine fruits, and shew itself in a suitable conduct, before it can pretend to any reward, then we seem to be agreed in the main point, though we differ in the manner of expressing it; we both make a good life the necessary and indispensable condition of our final justification with God; and it appears not from the Scriptures, that we, under our present circumstances, are concerned with any other.

If the true notion of faith be, that it is a principle naturally and essentially active †,

* Dr. Patten's Sermon.

† Dr. P. as above, p. 25.

if good works always, and inseparably attend it, with what propriety of language can the above-named Apostle * suppose it to be alone in any one, or without works? or with what justness does he put that concluding question, in which a negative is so strongly implied, *can faith save him?*

If faith be not founded on any kind of argument, or supported by any sort of outward evidence; if, as Mr. Wesley represents the matter, *it be shed abroad in men's hearts, even like lightning falling from heaven* †, it may, as far as the idea of necessity can suit with religion or morals, *be necessarily productive of good works*; if it be produced in so quick and inexplicable a manner, it may perhaps operate in a way as sudden and irresistible.

You and your brethren sometimes distinguish between faith and belief, making the one an active quality, which expresses itself in a proper and suitable behaviour, the other a speculative assent to Christ's mission and doctrine; I have no exception to the distinction you make, if you will only shew

* St. James ii. 14, 17.

† Mr. Wesley's Sermons, vol. 1. Mr. W. has lately expressed, in Lloyd's Evening-Post, his sorrow for the unfairness of this quotation. *Faith shed abroad in men's hearts*, (says he) *I never used such an expression in my life; I do not talk after this rate.* This is the passage, let the reader judge. "Many are the examples—of God's shedding abroad this
" faith in men's hearts, even like lightning, &c."

that

that it has any foundation in the plain declarations of Scripture, and will constantly keep to it, after you have made it. But you do not observe this distinction in the passages you quote, and plainly by your interpretation of some of them ascribe to believing all the good effects and covenanted blessings of a true and living faith.

But the great danger it seems arises not from the works themselves, but from our dependance on any thing we can do, as having any share or efficacy in the great affair of our salvation. Yet a man surely may make some proficiency in virtuous practice, may be careful in performing all proper acts of piety to God, and equity to men, and yet not be elated by the consciousness, or rely on the merit of his own performances, as sufficient to save or justify him; such, every one must own, is the weakness of our nature, so faulty are our utmost attainments in goodness, so imperfect after our best endeavours is our religious service, that we stand very much in need of God's gracious assistance in what we do, and of his mercy to forgive its defects: we can certainly have no reasonable hopes of obtaining salvation, but on the favourable terms of that covenant, which God was pleased to enter into with us through the merits and mediation of his son.

By

By virtue of this better covenant we are released from the hard conditions of that law, which required faultless obedience, and made no provision of mercy in cases of moral transgression. Under this gracious dispensation forgiveness is promised to our sincere repentance, and the miscarriages of our past life, upon our return to a better mind and behaviour, will not be laid to our charge, nor subject us to the punishment they deserved.

But “ *no future good behaviour (you say*) can make any atonement for past miscarriages. If I keep all God's laws to-day, this is no amends for breaking them yesterday. If I behave peaceably to my neighbour this day, (as you illustrate the point in that familiar way, wherein you so much excel) it is no satisfaction for having broke his head yesterday.*” This is very true, Sir, and I know not that the doctrine, which you oppose, is preached by the ministers, or professed by the followers of Christ. The change of our conduct cannot, by any operation of its own, cancel the guilt of former sins; our present righteousness cannot, in the nature of the thing, claim forgiveness of our past offences. But then the author of our salvation procured this great privilege for us by his merits, and ratified it to us by his death; so that though we can have no natural right to

* Mr. B. 1 Lett. p. 11. *for one to do as
such*

such a pardon, we may acquire a fœderal one ; which is in reality dispensed to us under the conditions of the gospel-covenant.

If I am once a sinner (as you proceed) *nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse me from sin.* And yet that was not shed, I apprehend, to cleanse men from sin without their own endeavours to curb their sinful passions ; that was not meant, as I should think, to purify them without their aiming to attain to purity of life. All the well-grounded hopes, we can entertain of forgiveness, are set before us in the merciful terms of his dispensation, and we may lay the surest foundation for those hopes in the diligent performance of these terms ; unless the barriers of our faith are altered and removed by the authority of new Apostles ; unless the standing means of salvation, as laid down in the gospel, are to give way to secret impulses and divine impressions ; unless repentance and remission of sins, the great and distinguishing doctrines of christianity, be superseded by sudden conversions, spiritual assurances, and the instantaneous effects of irresistible grace.

But though you acknowledge, that obedience is always to be comprehended under the notion of a true and saving faith, yet others of your brethren do not confess so much, or are not constant in that confession

sion, some disclaim obedience to the precepts of the gospel as useless, or condemn it as hurtful; while others seem to fluctuate in uncertainty, and allow or disallow it, as they happen to be in the mood.

Some of your own expressions on this head appear to me a little ambiguous, or I do not rightly apprehend their meaning; *Christ* (you say) *will either be a whole Saviour or none at all*; agreeably to this, Mr. W.* tells us, *A believer does not pretend to add the least to what Christ has done; it is spoiled by being added to.* Might not a common reader be induced to understand by these passages, that salvation has been purchased for us in an absolute and unconditional manner, and that the gospel requires no duties to be performed on our part, in order to intitle us to the rewards, which it proposes to its followers.

The necessity of our obedience to the Christian law, as any requisite or condition of our salvation, is by many of your fellow-writers plainly denied. The difference between the law and the gospel is said to be this, that the *one requires doing, the other not doing, but believing, for life and salvation* †. A late writer of a more flourishing and en-

* This passage is truly quoted, tho' not from Mr. Wesley; who, as he forgets what he has written himself, so he has not read, it seems, what his brethren have written.

† Marshall on Sanctification.

thusiastic turn, whose rhetorical manner and heightened language have made him much admired by one set of readers, thus expresses himself on the subject, *Must the efficacy of Christ's obedience be enforced by the accession of our works, maimed and worm-eaten things? —By the blood of sprinkling the most defiled transgressors become fair, as the fairest wool; nay, whiter than virgin-snow**. That deep divine, Mr. Richard Elliot, advances the same doctrine in more plain and simple expressions; *Who is justified by faith, is justified by Christ only; and whosoever adds any of his works as requisite to his acceptance with God, seeks to be justified by the law only; therefore, if any of you hope to be justified in his way, Christ is become of none effect unto you—all works of every kind are shut out, as being wholly unnecessary and useless in this great matter, even a sinner's justification before God†*. Agreeably to these principles, he thus advises his hearers, *take heed therefore, that you do not think by any preparatory works, to make yourselves worthy of Christ, lest you be found in the number of them, that continue to resist the Holy Ghost, rejecting the council of God against themselves; and thereby exclude yourselves from the hope of the gospel‡*;

* Mr. Hervey's Ther. and Asp. Vol. I.

† Sermon by the reverend Mr. Elliot, late chaplain of St. George's Hospital, called "Encouragement to Sinners, &c." p. 8, 10, 26.

‡ Mr. Elliot's Defence of his Sermon.

don't think it presumption to come to Christ in all your guilt, and in all your uncleanness, but rather be persuaded to come just as you are, and he will surely receive you.

But notwithstanding the wise caution of this pastor to his flock, that they should take such heed not to aim at making themselves worthy, but should *come before him in all their sin and shame*, yet we find it was Christ's particular direction to the Apostles, whom he sent forth to preach the gospel, that they should enquire in every city, *who were worthy*, and that it was made a just exception to some, who were called, *that they were not worthy*; by which expressions I well know, that faith in Christ's divine character, and a disposition to listen to the means of instruction he afforded, are in the first place to be understood; yet I likewise apprehend, that a proper temper of mind to act suitably to that instruction, and to conform to the preceptive parts of his doctrine, is also included under the notion of worthiness. Notwithstanding the strong assurances which this new preacher gives, that every one, who comes, will be favourably received, yet we find, that he who came to the marriage-feast, without having on a wedding-garment, was sent out with ignominy. It is implied, that this man was a believer, as

he accepted the invitation, and attended the solemnity; but he was not furnished with that essential qualification for coming thither as he ought, a disposition duely prepared and suitable to the occasion; he probably was unwilling *to put on Christ*, or to cloath himself with those virtues, which were then, and ever will be, necessary to make one of his true and faithful followers.

But how pious soever the design may be thought by some, of enhancing the privileges of faith, or of making the merits and righteousness of Christ all-sufficient of themselves for effecting our salvation, yet surely the Scriptures are to be understood in a consistent and uniform sense: the promises of the gospel are to be confined within those bounds, and regulated by those conditions, which the publisher of it has plainly laid down. And if any thing be plainly delivered in the gospel, it is as it might reasonably be expected to be, on what terms the attainment of salvation is there proposed to us, and those terms clearly are faith and repentance. We may, doubtless, with the utmost confidence rely on the veracity of Christ's gracious assurances, as far as they extend, and on the efficacy of his merits, as far as we are therein warranted to apply them; but we have no reason, I think, to suppose, that we can any way satisfy the intention of our Lawgiver,
but

but by paying a sincere and diligent submission to his laws, or that we can make ourselves by any other means acceptable to our Master, than by endeavouring to do our Master's will.

It must indeed be confessed, that if *we sow in righteousness* (to borrow a figurative expression from a writer of the Old Testament, which has been much copied by those of the New) so weak are our endeavours, so imperfect in many respects our best service, so much superior are the returns of harvest to the value of our labour, that *we must reap in mercy*. Salvation is not to be effected by our own works or obedience; but this glorious prospect is opened to us by Christ's death and resurrection, and by the gracious conditions of that covenant, which is published in the gospel. But then we cannot by that covenant confidently depend on the assurances there given of mercy, without using some endeavours on our part to make ourselves by repentance proper objects of that mercy; all-sufficient as our Saviour's merits are in effecting our redemption, yet we should make wild work with his religion, and the design of his mission, unless we use such lights as the Scriptures give us, in the application of them *; and he cannot, I think, be

* Mr. Wesley tells us of a methodist, who "knew and was sure, that if he had all the sins of the world laid upon him, one drop of Christ's blood was sufficient to atone for all." 3 Jour. p. 17. Thus

be properly said to have done every thing for us, if he has left something as necessary to be done by ourselves; something not as a ground of merit, or just claim to reward, but as a proper qualification for his favour, and a necessary condition of our final acceptance.

This confident reliance on the merits of Christ, without any consideration how his followers are warranted by the gospel to apply those merits to themselves; that presumptuous assurance of salvation, proceeding often from the illusions of self-flattery and conceit, instead of a due use of such means as are appointed to attain it, appear to me doctrines of the most dangerous tendency, greatly liable to be misapplied by the common people, and likely to lead them into mistakes of a very mischievous nature. For more, I am afraid, are betrayed by their own passions into a groundless expectation of God's favour, and tempted to continue in sin under this false security, than who are likely to forfeit that favour by over-

Thus that able and judicious divine Mr. Elliot, states the matter, "The blood of Christ is that which cleanseth from all sin; and this is done only through believing the word, which God hath spoken concerning it. Therefore, the promise of forgiveness of sins is not through our personal obedience, but through the obedience of Christ, which is imputed to us, if we believe on his name."

His Sermon. "Encouragement for Sinners, &c. p. 22.

valuing

valuing their own righteousness, or depending too much on the efficacy of a good life.

I know not whether the generality of Christians endeavour to settle accounts with their Lord and Master in so circumstantial a way, or bring Matters to so nice a decision, as you, it seems, tried to do. “ You
 “ put the justice of God into one scale,
 “ and as many good works of your own as
 “ you could into the other ; and when you
 “ found, as you always did, your own good
 “ works not to be a ballance to the divine
 “ justice, you then threw in Christ as a
 “ make-weight *”. This homely similitude may properly represent your own conceptions of this matter in your unenlightened state, and cannot fail of illustrating it wonderfully to your new disciples ; but if you mean to insinuate, that your own practice, (though I think your imagery is a little burlesque) will truly represent that of your brethren, I believe you do them wrong : they do not, I apprehend, entertain such a mean and degrading notion of our Saviour’s merit, nor speak in their discourses of its value, as *so light in the ballance, which they know and understand is to work for us so exceeding a weight of glory.*

But the grand error which runs, we are told, through all modern preaching, and frustrates the design of the gospel-covenant ;

* Mr. B’s first letter, p. 9.

that

that naughty doctrine, by which yourself was so fatally misled, and which made your ministry so totally without effect; that *after all the extraordinary pains you took for six years, not one soul was brought to Christ* *; is, that any one should hope for salvation by doing what he can for himself, and then relying on Christ for the rest †. This is that self-destroying doctrine, of which almost all the sermons published in the last century are full; we have free access, God be praised, to those divine writings, which contain the only account we can depend upon, of the Christian covenant; in that are many privileges granted, and promises made; by that also are many precepts given, and duties enjoined; the greatest of its promises is eternal life; which is said to be the gift of God, and to have been obtained for us through the merits and intercession of his Son; this is granted to us freely, but yet conditionally; it is on many accounts ascribed to the grace and mercy of God, but requires some qualifications on our part to fit and prepare us for the reception of that mercy. For Christ is expressly declared the *Author of salvation to them only who obey him*. Heb. v. 9.

But your charge against the clergy is much heightened; they *have been gradually depart-*

* Mr. B's first letter, p. 2.

† Ibid. p. 20, 21.

ing (you say) more and more from our doctrines, articles, and homilies; so that at length there is scarce a clergyman to be found, but who preaches contrary to the articles he subscribed.

This accusation is a heavy, and should not, I think, be a hasty one. The merits of it we shall best be able to see, when we have enquired what those doctrines of our church are, from which we are supposed to have so far deviated.

If it should be found, that you know but little of what you speak so confidently, we shall have an easy solution of the case in that general doctrine of assurances, whereof you and your fraternity appear to be so fond. The purposes you have to serve by aggravating charges, inflaming differences, and dealing in all the little tricks of calumny and misrepresentation, lie so open to every one, that you should in common prudence proceed with a little more caution and reserve in that matter, than you usually do. For how can you expect to raise any reputation of your own, but by attempts to undermine that of others? How can you bring yourselves into any credit, as you are not eminent for any superior attainments in knowledge, as you are such irregular ministers of the gospel, but by endeavouring to decry the merits and depreciate the ministry of your other brethren? And yet it

K

seems

seems to me to be singled out as one of the worst features in the portraiture of a certain dark and malignant spirit, that "*he was an accuser of the brethren.*"

The doctrine of our church, which you and your allies so strenuously list into your service, is declared in her articles, homilies, and public service: and we should doubtless understand it in so fair and equitable a manner, as to make her sense in this point, which she delivers in different places, uniform, if it can be made so, and consistent with itself. This sense the whole body of the clergy, except the chosen few, are accused in strong and opprobrious terms of deserting. They are charged with prevaricating in their subscription, and preaching up doctrines contrary to those which they have solemnly assented to; let us see, whether this charge be as strongly supported, as it is confidently made.

The XIth Article says, "That we are
 " accounted righteous before God only for
 " the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus
 " Christ by faith, and not for our own
 " works or deservings. Wherefore that we
 " are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort, as
 " more largely is expressed in the homily on
 " justification:" to which we are plainly referred for a fuller and more particular explication of its meaning. In king Edward's

ward's book of articles, the reference to this homily is much stronger and more explicit ;
 “ Justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ, in that sense in which it is explained in the homily of justification *, is the most certain and wholsom doctrine of Christians.”

It is very probable from many monuments now remaining, that archbishop Cranmer was chiefly concerned in drawing up this homily †, and that the object against which it was directly levelled, was the merit of good works, as then held and taught by the church of Rome. It occasioned accordingly a warm controversy between him and Gardiner, who as head of the Romish party here plainly saw its tendency, apprehended the bad effects it might have against one of their principal doctrines, and took up the dispute with much zeal. Furious in his temper, and irritated by this attack on the old religion, he entered into a very angry altercation with Cranmer on this subject ; some personal conferences were held, and many letters passed, in all which the bishop of Winchester laboured greatly to dissuade him from making this, or indeed any innova-

* Though no homily at present occurs under that title, yet the second and third parts of the homily on salvation treat of this subject, and are probably the places meant and referred to by both synods of 1552 and 1562.

† See Strype's Memorials of archbishop Cranmer in 1547.

tions in religion, especially during the king's minority.

The archbishop was disposed to treat him very gently in their first conversations on this subject, and told him, That his principal intention in this homily was only to set forth the freedom of God's mercy in pardoning sinners ; but Winchester soon took fire, and replied in a very angry manner, " That he would yield, if they could shew him any old writer, who had wrote how faith excluded charity in the office of justification ; and that it was against Scripture." He intimates the danger of giving way to this innovating spirit, " The vehemence of novelty (says he) will flow further, than your grace would admit ;" He complained also to the lord protector, in a letter written to him on this occasion, " That the archbishop in the homily of salvation had taken such a matter in hand, and handled it so, as if he were his extreme enemy, he would have wished him to have taken that piece in hand, and to have handled it as he did." He proceeds to blame him (the archbishop) for troubling the world with such an abstruse and unnecessary speculation as this, which, adds he, " may be sent to the universities, where it is meet to be talked and disputed of, but not fit for homilies *."

* Strype's Memorials, ib.

But

But notwithstanding the spleen and indignation with which Gardiner expressed himself against the archbishop, and for a very obvious reason; as he had a principal share in drawing up that homily, by which so severe a blow was aimed at one of the most favourite and gainful doctrines of the Romish church; yet we have great reason to be satisfied with the prudence and piety of his design; as the homily so well ascertains and establishes the true meaning of the article; guards it so properly against any misconstruction, to which its conciseness might make it liable; and gives no occasion to a reader, who considers the whole with attention, either to magnify too highly the efficacy of faith, or depreciate too much the necessity of good works.

It may here be proper to lay the words of the homily before the reader, and submit the sense of them to his judgment, as you and your brethren are continually urging, that what you teach on this subject is agreeable to the doctrine of our church, and shelter yourselves under this agreement, as the palladium of your cause. With regard to Christ's sacrifice, it is said, that God "with his endless mercy joined his most upright and equal justice; his great mercy he shewed in delivering us from our former captivity, without requiring any ransom to be paid,

paid, or amends to be made on our parts ; which thing by us had been impossible to be done ; and whereas it lay not in us to do that, he provided a ransom for us, that was, the most precious blood of his own most dear and best beloved Son. * By this sacrifice, it is added, † infants being baptized and dying in their infancy are washed from their sins, brought to God's favour, and made his children. And they which do sin after their baptism, when they *turn again to God unfeignedly*, they also are washed by this sacrifice from their sins, in such sort, that there remaineth not any spot of sin, that shall be imputed to their damnation."—Our entrance into the Christian church by baptism, and our admission by that means to all the privileges it confers on its members, seem to be considered as our first justification, and corresponding to that, whereby converts in the first age obtained remission of their sins by making profession of the Christian faith ; " ‡ our office is not to pass the time of this present life unfruitfully and idly, after that we are *baptized* or *justified*, not caring how few good works we do to the glory of God, and profit of our neighbours."

As to the nature and quality of that faith, which can be effectual to procure our final justification, it is thus described ; " A true and lively faith in Christ bringing forth good

* P. 21.

† P. 20.

‡ P. 29.

works,

works, and a life according to God's commandments." The same thing is clearly and strongly expressed in another place, "that we be justified by faith only, is not so meant, that it be alone in man, without true repentance, hope, charity, and the fear of God; nor when they say, that we should be justified freely, do they mean that we should or might afterwards be idle, and that nothing should be required on our parts; neither do they mean so to be justified without good works, that we should do no good works at all; but this saying, that we be justified by faith only, freely and without works, is spoken to take away clearly all merit of our works, as being unable to deserve our justification at God's hands, and thereby most plainly to express the weakness of man, and the goodness of God*." The reason assigned, why no man can be justified by his own good works, is this just and obvious one, "That no man fulfilleth the law according to the strict rigour of the law: for all the good works that we can do be imperfect, and therefore not able to deserve our justification†." What method a sinner must take as most available to obtain the forgiveness of his sins, is also delivered with as much plainness; "Although we, through infirmity or temptation of our ghostly enemy, do fall from him by sin, yet if we return again

* P. 24, 25.

† P. 22, 23.

unto

unto him by true repentance, he will forgive and forget our offences for his Son's sake our Saviour Jesus Christ." *

These passages †, compared and considered together, appear to me to deliver the sense of our church fully and clearly. As far as I can apprehend their meaning, they amount to this; though the modes of expression on a subject, about which there has been so much contention, will ever be liable to cavil and exception: That by baptism the original stain of our nature is washed away, and we are admitted to a participation of all those privileges, which belong to the body of Christians; that we cannot perform such a complete and unerring obedience to the law, as will entitle us to eternal life, and therefore we must owe it to God's mercy, and our Saviour's merits; that when we have violated the law, and thereby incurred God's displeasure, we have the means set before us in the gospel of restoring ourselves to his favour; that this method is an unfeigned repentance, and is one of the invaluable benefits procured for us by the obedience and death of Christ; that on these, and not on any thing, which we ourselves can do or deserve, must we depend as the meritorious

* P. 33.

† Taken from the Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind, 3 parts, and a short Declaration of True and Christian Faith. Queen Elizabeth's Homilies, reprinted 1687, 12mo.

cause

The remaining 6 pages at the end of the

~~The following 6 pages belong to the~~
~~next but one foregoing.~~

[73]

cause of our justification ; but that a serious concern for any instances of misbehaviour on our part, and a sincere resolution of behaving better, are made necessary and indispensable conditions of rendering us acceptable to God, securing his favour, and thereby effecting our salvation.

Many of our homilies, and particularly this from which we have made our extracts, were plainly drawn up to guard the members of our communion against the dangerous effects of some popish doctrines, which tended to frustrate the main intention of our religion, the advancement of real goodness, by a perverted application of its ordinances. Such doctrines are, that " the use of the sacraments, accompanied only with an imperfect sorrow, so finishes and completes these religious acts, that they will be sufficient to justify us ; " that the inherent holiness of good men has such a real condignity in it, as must be available with God, the righteous Governor of the world, to treat and accept them as just persons. The good works too, which were in most repute, and were supposed to hold the highest rank of perfection at the time of the reformation, are well known to have been the endowment of religious houses, the donation of lands to pious uses, rich presents to the images and shrines of saints, whose favourable interposition would divert

L

all

all evil from, and dispense all manner of good to their votaries, would soonest cancel the guilt of their offences, and best recommend them to God's acceptance; whose relicks accordingly attracted all the reverence, and engrossed all the devotion of that age; so that the worship of Christ was in a manner neglected, in comparison of the superior veneration which was paid to them.

In this state of religion it became necessary for our first reformers to assert the honour of our Redeemer, which was given to others, and to vindicate the merit of his atonement, which by these notions was rendered insignificant. Under these circumstances it was proper to beat down the vain presumption of man, who pretended to claim eternal life, as the just recompence of his own deservings; and to set forth the value of that complete obedience, and the efficacy of that meritorious death, to a sincere faith and reliance on which we must ever owe, and ought always to ascribe the acceptance of our own imperfect righteousness.

And this was done with great skill and judgment, if we consider the difficulty of the work which they undertook, and the strength of the prejudices which they had to encounter. For notions contrary to those which they endeavoured to introduce, had been imprinted by early education, and confirmed

firmed by long habits of thinking; had been enforced by an authority which they accounted infallible, and recommended by such motives of interest, as are not usually withstood.—The Romanists, it must be owned, in their later writings, have treated this subject in a manner more agreeable to the sense and intention of Scripture; but the language, which they used at that time, must be duely attended to, if we would properly understand the true use and meaning of the article, and of the homily drawn up on purpose to explain it.

I now, Sir, take my leave of you at present, and must wait for another opportunity of renewing our correspondence. Another and a better, it is rumoured, may shortly offer; as you are said to have a design of publishing some sermons on the subject we are considering, which were lately preached before the university of Cambridge, and which the lenity and moderation of that learned body, though there was something offensive enough in your manner of treating *them*, suffered to pass without any reprehension. I would rather indeed defer my enquiry into your method of reasoning and expounding Scripture, till these discourses appear: in which you have doubtless selected with what judgment, and urged with what force you were able, the proofs brought to support

the distinguishing doctrines of your sect; as they were produced on such an occasion, and offered before so respectable a society. These proofs indeed appear to have no great strength or solidity, as they now stand in your two letters; but then it must be considered, that you had no great occasion to exert your reasoning powers, or to exhaust much of your learning in the looseness and familiarity of an epistle, intended for the instruction, and written only for the perusal of a private friend.

As to the manner in which I have addressed you, if I should be thought to have assumed in some places a more light and bantering air, than may suit the seriousness and importance of the subject, I have great examples to plead in my behalf, and under whose authority I can easily shelter myself. Your own, I mean, and that of your brethren; who most of them affect, like you, to play the droll and mix some degree of pleasantry in their gravest discourses; who seldom fail, I am told, to enliven their popular harangues with occasional digressions and strokes of humour; who are wont to relieve the severity of reasoning and the tediousness of method with little excursions of fancy and familiar illustrations, adapted to the capacity of those polished and discerning judges,

judges, of which their audience chiefly consists.

It is indeed in this desultory way, wherein the most applauded preachers among you are said to excel ; and I should imagine you would keep to that, in which your chief strength lies. You will certainly do better, while you pretend to act only as partisans ; you may keep up a little bush-fighting in controversy, you may skirmish a while with your feeble body of irregulars, but you must never trust to your polemical skill in any of the carnal weapons which are now in use ; you will never depend, I should think, on any discipline of reasoning you have learnt to practice, or on any weight of argument you can bring into the field : this is indeed all of it a sort of *head-knowledge*, that has nothing to do with that species of it in which you chiefly deal, an inward sense of *feeling*, the *experimental* knowledge and *conviction* of the heart. Those are the advantages of human learning, which you renounce, and in which you must be acknowledged to act agreeably to prudence, as well as suitably to your principles ; for they never can be brought to serve that cause, which you are engaged to support.

If therefore you should be charged with arguing weakly or inconsistently, you will doubtless carry the matter to another judicatory,

which, as not cognisable at the bar of reason, if you should be found to interpret particular passages of Scripture in a sense repugnant to the general design, and contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture, you will have recourse to an obscure and mystical language, which none but the Elect can understand; you will darken the sense all around you, for the same reason for which a certain fish is said to muddle the water; you will run the less hazard of being caught, while you are in the less danger of being seen. Whenever you are closely pressed, you will be sure to retire behind the sacred inclosures of fanaticism, to lodge yourself in the entrenchments of secret impressions and assurances, which have been so prudently thrown up to secure your retreat. These fastnesses are very difficult of access; a way perhaps may be found of forcing you out of them, but I doubt whether any one can undertake to follow you.

I am, S I R,

Yours,



ACADEMICUS